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The Eunuchs and women exploited by the Arabs, the Chinese and the Cholas

K. V. Ramakrishna Rao, B.Sc., M.A., A. M. I. E., C.Eng (I)., B. L.,

Independent Researcher. Superintendent of Central Excise. Director – Institute for the Study of Ancient Indian Arts and Sciences	25 (Old.9), Venkatachala Iyer Street, West Mambalam, Chennai – 600 033 Cell: 98402 92065 e- mail: kopallerao@yahoo.co.uk

Introduction: The contemporary history of the warring countries of Asia – India, China and Arabia during 10th to 13th centuries show a transition in local power, maritime trade and market economy of the respective country. While the Chola empire was exerting power in the South and South East Asian countries, the Arabs tried to consolidate their rule at Delhi transforming from the plundering of Ghaznavis (917-1030)[1], invading Ghoris (1176-1206) and to settling down with Slave / Mamluk dynasty (1206-1290). The Chinese were ruled by the Tang (618-907), the northern Song (960-1127), the Southern Song (1127-1279) and Ming (1368-1644) dynasties. The Indians were ruled by the Cholas (985-1267) with their feudatories and representatives including those of the South East Asian countries. The maritime rivalry and domination transformed sometimes on the lands resulting in power struggles.

Though the Mongol conquests of 13th century inflicted changes of power among the Arabs and the Chinese, the Indians escaped[2]. Interestingly "*Dava Chakravarti*" Sambanda Perumal could graciously get permission from Chekachai Khan [Chingis Khan (1167-1227)] and construct a Siva-Vishnu Temple / Choleswaram[3] at Quanzhou[4] with a Tamil-Chinese[5] inscription! Whether Cholas applied any diplomatic tricks or not is not known. However, after an hundred years, Malikkafur, an eunuch could march down to the South in 1311-12 to loot temples at Chidambaran, Sri Rangam etc., carrying the bullion on the elephants marching slowly towards Delhi. And after another hundred years, another eunuch, Zheng He could undertake not one but seven voyages like

[1] The accompanying Al-beruni / Abu Raihan (997-1030) with Mohammed Ghazni was writing about India of 11th century with all details as "Tahqiq ma lil-Hind" otherwise known as "Indica" or India. That is why the editor Edward C. Sachau commented, "***While the ruthless conqueror Mahmud was harrying India by fire and sword destroying and plundering its cities and temples, the great Arabic scholar engaged himself in studying the culture and civilization of the country***".

[2] J. J. Saunders, ***The History of the Mongol Conquests***, Routledge & Kegan Paul, London, 1971, p.248. The author wonders, "India was the only major Aian land to escape Mongol devastation: the occasional raids were destructive but transitory".

[3] For exhaustive discussion, see the following:
Haraprasad Ray, ***Trade and trade routes between India and China, c. 140 B.C.-A.D. 1500,*** Progressive Publishers, Kolkatta, 2003, pp.242-256.

[4] Quanzhou has been a coastal city in the Fujian Province of South China, where a Tamil settlement was there during 12th-13th centuries, but disappeared. Even the temple constructed disappeared.

[5] The Quanzhou bilingual inscription has been very famous, but mutilated, broken and manipulated for best reasons known to the Chinese authorities.

Sindbad during 1405-1433 threatening South Indian coasts, even when the Cholas disappeared at that time! Under the circumstances, such changes are studied in the context of exploitation of women and transgenders, as they appeared to have played crucial role among these people groups of three civilizations.

Eunuchs, castration, production of transgenders by the Arabs and the Chinese: Eunuch is a castrated man i.e, when a man's genital is removed by operation or otherwise at a singular time or continuous period, he becomes an eunuch. The Arabs called them as "Hijrahs" and "Zananas", whereas, the Chinese mentioned them "Neishi"[6]. The Arabs / Mohammedans officially employed the Hijrahs / Zananas to take care of harems as they were castrated males, who could not exploit the females sexually, but were able to carry out all the domestic work[7]. They synthesized males by castrating Hijrahs at young age and as such, they were neither physically declared as males nor females, however acquiring behavior as expected by the trainer. They also targeted perverted males to join harem deliberately for earning as well as by transvesting their sex to satisfy their mental aberration of becoming a female. They also produced another set of perverted males who were called as *Zananas,* who were basically males having intact male organs, but behave like females with their garments and habits and even they attracted males for sodomy. The Arabs and Mohammedans used both Hijrahs and *Zananas,* who were professionally working as catamites obeying their masters.

The Arabs and eunuchs: The exploitation of eunuchs was found from the advent of Islam, up to the beginning of the sixteenth century, in the major centres of Islam in the East (Umayyads, 'Abbasids, Seljuks, Zengids, Ayyubids and Mamluks and to some extent, the Fatimids of Egypt). The power accumulated by the eunuchs, military, socially and even economically (especially as trustees of financial affairs and property) in the Islamic society had been significant. David Ayalon[8] finds a close ties connecting it to the harem, the eunuchs and the Mamlkus. He points out in all of these three areas, the dominant element had been slaves (Islamised and often enfranchised) who were imported beyond the lands of Islam. The eunuchs were usually the upbringers of the young Mamlkus and quite often their commanders. The Mamlkus themselves, in various and changing forms, constituted the mainstay of Islam to the harem, the eunuchs and the Mamluks.

The Chinese and eunuchs: The Chinese exploitation of eunuchs was found extensively during the Tang (618-907), Northern Song (960-1127), Southern Song (1127-1279) and Ming (1368-1644) periods. In fact, such exploitation is attributed for the downfall of these dynasties by the Chinese scholars and historians[9]. There were two

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[6] Interestingly, the Chinese expressions "nei shi" and "wais hi" resemble "agam" and "puram" concepts of the ancient Tamils and the scholars dealing with "nei shi" and "wais hi" translate them as inner affairs and outer affairs.

[7] The Mohammedan harems were called Zanana, Zanana Khana and so on. Eunuchs were thus appointed as secuirity guards to the harems and the senior eunuchs were known as Khwaja Sara or Nazirs.
K. S. Lal, ***The Moghul Harem***, Aditya Prakashan, New delhi, 1988, p.56.
Whether the Chinese "Neishi" has anything to do with "Nazir" or otherwise is not known, though both are expressions used for eunuchs in the Arabic and Chinese respectively.

[8] David Ayalon, ***Eunuchs, Caliphs and Sultans***,

[9] http://www.travelchinaguide.com/intro/history/tang/reason-decline.htm

types – forced and voluntary castration performed on the chosen ones, i.e, they should not be from their own ethnic groups. Most of the eunuchs were supplied from the southern provinces of china, particularly Fujian, Guangdong and Guangxi, where most of the "outsiders" were found. Christian Doran gives the following details[10]:

1. Several interesting customs surrounded the practice of voluntary castration, especially when it became more organized and institutionalized during the Ming and Qing dynasties.
2. The operations took place in a small shed just outside one of the palace gates in Beijing. When the operation had been completed, the newly-made eunuch was entitled to retain the severed body parts - generally consisted of the penis, scrotum and testicles.
3. The detached body parts were known as the *pao*, or "treasure", kept in a sealed container with alcohol as a preservative fluid and retained by the eunuch.
4. There were two reasons why the *pao* was carefully preserved – 1. In order to obtain employment and promotion, eunuchs had to produce their *pao* for inspection by the chief eunuch and 2. The *pao* was considered necessary for burial with the eunuch‟s body after his death, as the Chinese believed that in the next world bodily integrity would be restored.

Thus, eunuchs were institutionalized in the Chinese royal life, just like the medieval Arabs and Mohammedans. As Chinese emperor was considered divine, only the eunuchs had privilege of entering into their personal chambers and bedrooms. In the China's dynastic history, the employment of eunuch at the Chinese royal courts ranged between 3,000 and 70,000 at various times reaching peak during the later Ming dynasty (1368-1644). Though, the Song period was considered as the period of "commercial revolution" and "industrial revolution", the role of eunuchs was not revealed by the Chinese chroniclers. Thus, it is evident that they were shifted from the royal courts to ship-boards to take part in the maritime trade and connected issues. Thus, they were used for different purposes playing roles as spies, tax-collectors, mediators, ambassadors, secret-killers[11], soldiers, sailors, merchants and so on[12]. When one Chu-lian / Chola embassy came to Chinese emperor from Zhu-nian / Chola Empire, the later sent a neishi / eunuch / palace attendant to entertain them[13]. "Neishi" was a title given to eunuchs[14] in the palace during the Song period (960-1279 CE). Ironically, when one

[10] Christine Doran, ***Chinese Palace Eunuchs: Shadows of the Emperor***, Nebula, No.7.3, September, 2010, p.13.
[11] James Tong, ***Disorder under heaven: collective violence in the Ming Dynasty***, Stanford University Press, California, 1991.
[12] Shih-shan Henry Tsai, ***The Eunuchs in the Ming Dynasty***, State University of New York Press, Albany, USA, 1996.
[13] Noboru Karashima and Tansen Sen, ***Chinese texts describing or referring to the Chola kingdom as Zhu-nian***, in 'Nagapattinam to Suvarnadwipa: Reflections on the Chola Naval Expeditions to Southeast Asia', edited by Helmann Kulke, K. Kesavapany and Vijay Sakhuja, Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, Singapore, 2009, p.301, 313.
[14] Noboru Karashima and Tansen Sen, ***Opt.cit***, Appendix-II, p.313.

Chola emperor was offering his daughter herself to a Chinese emperor for marital ties, the Chinese emperor should have sent a neishi to entertain Qi-luo-lou[15]!

Chinese interest over South Indian women: The remarks made by the Chinese chroniclers on the South Indian women have been intriguing and curious. Chau Ju-Kau noted[16] about the Malabar King that, "*He is attended by a guard of some five hundred picked foreign women (^ ^^)[17], chosen for their fine physique. Those in front lead the way with dancing, their bodies draped, bare footed and with a cotton loin-cloth*". Here, the employment of foreign women as bodyguards of Malabar king raises some doubts, if the Chinese noting has to be taken into cognition.

- Whether they were actually women-bodyguards or eunuchs used for the purpose,
- how he could trust such foreign women or
- Were they thrusted on him by the Arabs or the Chinese.

He records how a Chola prince takes food and then notes, "*For his table and escort he employs fully a myriad dancing-girls (^), three thousand of whom are in attendance daily in rotation*". While they were using eunuchs, perhaps, they were surprised to witness girls dancing and attending to South Indian Kings and Princes. Chau ju-Kau also notes[18], "*When a woman is guilty of adultery she is put to death, and the officials make no enquiry about it*". Therefore, how the society considered virtue is revealed here, though, the erring women were punished.

The Indians and eunuchs: In Indian tradition, there have been instances of eunuchs, but in the medieval period, there are hardly any instances of their existence, but for the Mohammedan intrusion as pointed out above. The eunuch culture perhaps starts with the invading Arabs transforming into established institution in the northern India during the Slave / Mamluk period (1250-1517). The Mohammedan invaders or the settled ones at Delhi used to have young, beautiful boys as companions in those days and they were invariably eunuchs. When they had grown up with vigour and strength, they became body guards, leaders and commanders. The Arabic and Persian poetry was always enamored with the handsome boys and beautiful eunuchs. The Sultans had favourite eunuchs to attend to all their wants. Incidentally, in Iran and north India, during this period erotic literature was produced.

The Cholas and women: The Cholas employed women in their empire for different purposes and there is no direct evidence that they used eunuchs for any purpose like their counterparts Chinese or Arabs. During Rajaraja reign (985-1014) and Rajendra (1012-1044), women were used for temple services, as could be noted from the inscriptions. They were known as "Taliccherip pendir" (தளிச்சேரிப் பெண்டிர்), i.e, women living in quarters situated near the temple (Tali = temple[19], ceri = living

[15] Qi-luo-lou was the name of a Chola ambassador visited the court of the Chinese emperor with tributes in 1077 CE, as has been recorded in the Chinese records.
[16] Friedrich Hirth and W.W. Rockhill (translated from the Chinese and annotated by), ***Chau Ju-kau his work on the Chinese and Arab trade in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, entitled Chu-fan-chï***, Imperial Academy of Sciences , St. Petersburg, 1911, Chapter-19, p.90.
[17] Ibid, The Chinese characters are missing.
[18] Ibid, p.97.
[19] Sirupanatruppadai.63:3.

together). Though the inscriptions do not explain the nature of services provided by these women, the later-day Pandya inscriptions point out that they were known as "Tevaradiyargal" (தேவரடியார்கள்) and providing the following services[20]:

1. Tiruvalagituthal (திருவலகிடுதல்) - doing decoration work
2. Tirumezhugiduthal (திருமெழுகிடுதல்) - cleaning temple with liquids, colloidal substances
3. Taligai vilakkuthal (தளிகை விளக்குதல்) - cleaning temples
4. Amudhupadikku arisi kazhuvuthal (அமுதுபடிக்கு அரிசி கழுவுதல்) - cleaning rice for preparing food.

In fact, the Tiruvotriyur inscription details that the following categories of women provide the specific services as follows:

Sl. No	Name / expression	Their services / duties
1	Tevaradiyar (தேவரடியார்)	Airing with "White Fan" (Vensamaram) to God
2	Pathiyilar (பதியிலார்)	Airing with "White Fan" to God at a specified time, had expertise in the "Cokkam" type of dance, used to sing when Itchapatali women dance.
3	Itchapataliyar (இச்சபத் தளியிலார்)	Perform dance and sing exclusively

He reportedly brought 400 women from different parts of Cholamandalam and made to reside near the Big Temple. Inscriptional evidences prove that not only women, but also men were brought. These women and men also were found in Ceris but also in places known as "Velam" (வேளம்[21] = காவல் புரியும் இடம், a protected place). Not only for mple maintenance, but for the temple and other construction works, naturally thousands of men and women must have been used. Either, they must have been already experts in their respective profession or trained. Therefore, the expression 'velam' cannot be construed to like harem, zanana and nei-shi, as some modern scholars

[20] South Indian Temple Inscriptions, Vol.I, 212 of 1912, No.525, pp..511-513.

[21] The expression velam, if formed vel + am, then it could denote the place that is lovable or where the Velir clan resides or the place of Murugan, as the word vel has the following meanings (as per 'Pre-Pallavan Tamil Index' by N. Subramanian):

1. literally that is lovable denoting Murugan
2. Kaman / manmathan.
3. A member of velir clan.
4. Dattattireyan
5. Murugan.

Therefore, such connotation cannot be construed for the later period. Thus, velam could connote the protected place like padaividu.

tried to suggest[22]. Thus, the negative or bad connotation of these words arose during the modern period, many times, with the forceful and forced understanding that the temple-women were prostitutes.

Whether eunuchs were employed by the Arabs and the Chinese to eliminate Cholas? K. A. Nilakanta Sastri has already pointed out about the existence of slavery[23], particularly women bought and sold for economic reasons viz., poverty[24]. However, there is no evidence that they were used for prostitution. Similarly, the castration was not practiced till the advent of the Mohammedans, but nt in South India. Therefore, the practice of exploiting eunuchs for entertainment or sodomy is ruled out. However, during the 250 years (from Rajaraja to Kulottunga) as the naval expeditions had been frequent with the participation of all the three groups Indians / Cholas, Arabs / Mohammedans and Chinese / Songs, during such cross-cultural actions and interactions, eunuchs played damaging role that could be inferred from the consequences. The offer of eunuchs to the officials of the Chola embassies who came to meet the Chinese emperors has already been pointed out. Had the mention of Chau ju-Kau to be taken as truth, the Malabar / Chera King was already under the grip of foreign women-bodyguards, that too specifically "*chosen for their fine physique",* as recorded by him. Naturally, such strong and well-built physique bodied "women" should have been eunuchs. As China city and Arab settlements were there already, the eunuch attack on the Cholas must have been so easy. Thus, in spite of "Kantalur kalamaruttal" activities, the eunuchs methodology would have worked well in the Chola country.

The mysterious deaths of Chola envoys in China: Soli San-wan was Rajaraja's Vice-Minister who proceeded to Guangzhou, China in 1015 CE on diplomatic embassy heading 52 members mission. Travelling for 1150 days, they reached Guangzhou to meet the Song emperor. The presentation ceremony was held in Kaifeng, the ten capital of Guangzhou on October 15, 1015. After the mission, when they were returning in 1016, San-wan was died mysteriously in Xiangyi, in Sui county of Henan province on the Grand canal. Hraprasad Ray noted[25], "*What happened to his entourage was not known*", adding, "*Had this envoy returned to India he would have left some account of contemporary China and Sino-Indian relations*". In 1020, Rajendra sent Pa-lan-de-malie-di to offer tribute, but he died of an illness on his arrival at Guangzhou[26]. However, the others were sent back with banquets and rich presents. Here also the reason for death is not known, as the translators have not given. Here, it has to be noted that some translators, though giving the first death, the second one is not mentioned. Therefore, the mysterious deaths of the ambassadors of the Cholas in China raise critical questions:

1. Whether the Heads of the Chola embassy / trade missions died naturally?

[22] Daud Ali, ***The Service retinues of the Chola court: a study of the tern velam in Tamil inscriptions***, Bulletin of Scholl of Oriental and African Studies, Vol.70, 2007, pp.487-509.
[23] K. A. Nilakanta Sastri, ***Colas***, University of Madras, 1984, pp.555-559.
[24] Ibid, fn.47, p.564.
[25] Haraprasad Ray, ***Trade and trade routes between India and China, c. 140 B.C.-A.D. 1500,*** Progressive Publishers, Kolkatta, 2003, pp.241-243.
[26] Noboru Karashima and Tansen Sen, ***opt.cit***, p.299.

2. Or were they killed by the Chinese to send a warning to the Cholas, as they wanted to dominate the SEA areas.
3. They were killed by the entertaining eunuchs, but mentioned as so suppressing the facts.
4. The reaction the Chola Emperors is not known.
5. When Rajaraja could punish the Chera King, Rajendra could proceed to Srivijaya to teach a lesson, could they kept quite and continued to send missions with tributes to the Chinese emperors?
6. Or Rajendra invaded China also, thus, in turn, the Chinese and the Arabs planned to attack the Cholas?
7. The above hypothesis could perhaps answer the sudden fall of both Song and Chola empires reducing their power considerably in their respective counties.
8. The Cholas settlements in Quanzhou and the Chinese settlements in Nagapattinam and Calicut destroyed / disappeared.

These questions are raised considering the role of eunuchs played in the Chinese and SEA context committing atrocious acts of crimes and violence[27]. When they could bring downfall to Ming and Tan dynasties inflicting sorrow on the Song women making the dark period for them, they could have very well played such role in the affairs of the Cholas. As the Chinese interpreters were required, just like other SEA countries, the Chinese could have resorted to the services of "*Chinese barbarian officials*"[28], who might have undermined the Cholas. The Buddhist role is also suspected, in spite of the grants extended to them in Nagapattinam.

The Role of Buddhist monks and nuns during Song-Chola period: Interestingly, Buddhist monks played a key role during the 10th-15th centuries, as most of the Buddhists of the Arabian Peninsula became Mohammedans, the Chinese followers of Confucianism became Buddhists and the Buddhist Chinese could exercise influence in the Chola kingdom. They were accompanied with the nuns / Bikkunis (Buddhist female monks) since the earlier periods[29]. It is quite natural that the Buddhists aided and abetted with the Chinese in increasing the trade between China and India[30]. Ironically, just like Indian Mohammedans, the Chinese Buddhists were only helping their oversea masters from India. And again interestingly, when the Buddists of China and Arabia were happily performing journeys on the Silk route both by land and sea, the poor Indians were restricted from carrying on foreign trade, as they were instructed not to cross the oceans[31]. Many Buddhist nuns migrated to China from India during the material period through both road and sea silk-routes. Therefore, the

[27] David M. Robinson, ***Bandits, eunuchs, and the sons of heaven: rebellion and the economy of violence in Mid-Ming China***, University of Hawaii's Press, USA, 2001.
[28] Hok-Lam Chan, ***The "Chinese Barabarian officials" in the foreign tributary missions to China during the Ming dynasty***, pp.411-416.
[29] Though, Buddha originally opposed the induction of the female monks in the order, particularly, the non-Indian monasteries encouraged such practice.
[30] Johan Elverkog, ***Buddhism and Islam on the Silk Road***, university of Pensilvania Press, USA, 2010, p.32, 33, 86.
[31] This is interpreted or rather misinterpreted that the Hindus, particularly, the Brahmins should not cross the oceans. However, ironically, the presence of Brahmins in China and SEA has been pointed out by the Chinese and Buddhist scholars during the material period.

influence of Indian feminine virtues on the Song Chinese society was appreciable, particularly when the Tang and Ming dynasties were infested with pirates, privateers and buccaneers. Thus, during Song period, the Chinese would have tread middle path keeping their females virtue protected and targeting the "foreigners / barbarians" with eunuch diplomacy in their "foreign tributary missions".

Chinese Royal wives revered chastity, promoted temple art and valour: There are some striking parallels between the Song and Chola dynasties as could be noted from the following details culled from the various Chinese sources. According to Tian Dandan[32], "*the Song Dynasty appears to be a turning point in terms of defining "women of virtue" in China. After the Song Dynasty, the model for a most virtuous woman became someone who safeguarded her chastity under trying circumstances. The women of Southern Song dynasty decided to refrain from seeking a second marriage until the country was no longer under attack from northern barbarian tribes, or until they had taken their personal vengeance against the enemy who murdered their husbands*". In other words, these women were influenced by external factors to do so, as the southern provinces were dominated by the people of Indian origin, particularly the Buddhists and as well as non-Buddhists. The women of Song dynasty were artists and patrons of Buddhist art as revealed in many specimens[33]. Hui-shu Lee points out from multiple perspectives, the connections between Empress Liu the first empress and the production of Jin Shrine sculptures in Shanxi[34]., was copied by her successors virtually followed the model of art patronage, she pioneered [35]. The medieval Chinese are known to be heavily patriarchal, but even such a culture produced many formidable women warriors, as daughters of prominent military families were trained in the martial arts and wives of generals were often chosen for their battle skills. The Yang family of the Song Dynasty (960-1279 CE) was one such military family. When the men were decimated on various military assignments, their wives, mothers, sisters and even maidservants took their places on the battlefield[36]. Yang Ye, a general of Yang family was deified and there are temples dedicated to his family, thus, the ancestral temple in Lutijian village not only contains images of Yang Ye and his wife, She Caihua but also of his heroic offspring, twenty-two in all[37]. There is another view that the Song dynasty (960-1279), a period that has sometimes been seen as a 'dark age' for Chinese women owing to the emergence of Neo-Confucianism[38].

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[32] http://www.asianresearch.org/articles/1513.html

[33] Hui-shu Lee., ***Empresses, Art and Agency in Song Dynasty China***, Seattle and London: University of Washington Press, 2010.

[34] This is similar to the wives and other royal women contributing and donating to the temples, as could be easily noted in many Chola inscriptions.

[35] http://www.wagnet.ox.ac.uk/wagrev/journals/articles/00603.pdf

[36] "Warriors: Asian women in Asian society

[37] Yanmenguan has a rich historical heritage, well documented in official records and folklore. One ancestral temple built in 1279in Lutijian village, 49 kilometres south of the pass, was once used to pay homage to Yang Ye, a Song dynasty general who died fighting the Qidans of the Liao dynasty. The ancestral temple in Lutijian village not only contains images of Yang Ye and his wife, but also of his heroic offspring, twenty two in all.
http://www.chinauniquetour.com/html/Datong/2008613/arts-4374.html

[38] Man Xu, ***Places and objects Interpreting Women's space in Fujian during the Song dynast (960-1279)***, ProQuest LLC, USA, 2011, p.1.